

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 05475 261432Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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R 261336Z AUG 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4585
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
SECDEF
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 5475

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PLO
SUBJECT: WAR PHOTOGRAPHER REPORTS ON PLO SITUATION IN SO. LEBANON

1. IN CHANCE ENCOUNTER WITH LEBANESE WAR PHOTOGRAPHER SAMIR (LNU) WHO ACCOMPANYING US JOURNALIST IN DAMASCUS, EMBOFF GIVEN SUBJECTIVE ACCOUNT OF CONDITIONS AMONG PLO GROUPS IN SOUTH LEBANON. SAMIR SAID HE WAS FROM SMALL VILLAGE IN SOUTH LEBANON NEAR THE ISRAELI BORDER AND HAS BEEN COVERING THE WAR, USUALLY FROM FATAH LINES, SINCE FALL OF KARANTINA. HE NOW SPENDS MOST OF HIS TIME IN SOUTH LEBANON AND HAD BEEN THERE MOST RECENTLY ON AUGUST 23. HE MADE NO SECRET OF HIS STRONG PRO-FATAH SYMPATHIES AND SAID FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS CALL HIM "AL MAJNUUN" (THE CRAZY ONE) BECAUSE ON MANY OCCASIONS HE HAD EXPOSED HIMSELF TO CONSIDERABLE DANGER IN ORDER TO GET WAR FOOTAGE.

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 05475 261432Z

2. ACCORING TO SAMIR, MORALE AMONG PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS IN SOUTH LEBANON IS HIGH. HE CLAIMED INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE PALESTINIAN SHELLING OF THE GATES CONNECTING SOUTH LEBANON AND ISRAEL HAD SLOWED CROSSINGS TO A TRICKLE. AS PROOF OF THIS, HE CITED INCIDENT WHEREIN CHRISTIAN COMMANDER, JUST PRIOR TO SAMIR'S DEPARTURE FROM AREA, HAD SENT EMISSARIES TO DISTRICT FATAH LEADER ASKING ABOUT POSSIBILITY

OF ARRANGING A TRUCE AND HINTING AT OPPORTUNITY FOR COOPERATION AGAINST ISRAELIS. CHRISTIANS COMPLAINED THAT ISRAEL WAS USING THEM AND HAD NO REAL INTEREST IN THEIR WELFARE. SAMIR SAID THAT THE FATAH COMMANDER HAD SENT THEM BACK WITH SOME PROPOSED TERMS AND WAS STILL AWAITING A REPLY.

3. PLO-SYRIAN RELATIONS. SAMIR SAID THAT SHTAURA AGREEMENT WAS NEVER LIKELY TO BE FULLY IMPLEMENTED BUT FATAH CADRES DID NOT EXPECT ANY MAJOR CONFRONTATION TO DEVELOP

WITH SYRIA. HE BOASTED THAT THE SYRIANS FEAR PALESTINIAN FIGHTING ABILITIES AND HAVE NO DESIRE TO RISK ANOTHER ALL-OUT CONFRONTATION. SINCE SHTAURA AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED, FATAH HAS HAD LITTLE TROUBLE MOVING MEN AND MATERIEL INTO THE SOUTH THROUGH SYRIAN LINES. HE CLAIMED FATAH SHARES ITS WEAPONRY WITH OTHER GROUPS HAVING DIFFICULTIES WITH SYRIA. HE SAID SAIQA'S PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH IS NOT GREAT, AND CHARGED MOST OF THEM ARE WORKING FOR "SYRIAN ARMY INTELLIGENCE."

4. INTRA-PLO DEVELOPMENTS. SAMIR CONTENDED THAT HAWATMAH'S PFLP IS NOT AS CLOSELY ALIGNED WITH FATAH AS WAS THE CASE DURING THE CIVIL WAR AND PRIOR TO THE PALESTININE NATIONAL COUNCIL IN MARCH. HE SAID HAWATMAH WAS MANEUVERING BETWEEN THE REJECTIONISTS AND FATAH. HE BELIEVED THAT AHMAD JIBRIL'S PFLP-GC IS RAPIDLY LOSING GROUND TO THE BREAKAWAY ABU AL-ABBAS FACTION AND THAT ABU AL-ABBAS HAS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 05475 261432Z

STRONG CONTINGENTS IN BOTH TYRE AND SIDON.

5. COMMENT: SAMIR WAS FULL OF BRAVADO AND MAY WELL HAVE EXAGGERATED EXTENT OF FATAH'S SUCCESS AND MORALE IN SOUTH LEBANON.
MURPHY

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